

The Driver Training School Program

The Driver Training School Program is responsible for promoting public safety through the licensing, inspection, and regulatory compliance of driver training schools and instructors.

This program screens school and instructor qualifications and backgrounds, investigates complaints, and initiates disciplinary actions including license suspension, revocation, cancellation, and denial. These actions ensure that schools and instructors deliver the required classroom and behind-the-wheel student training.

The Department of Licensing (DOL) took over the program from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in 2002. At that time, there were 119 driver schools. Today there are 220 schools and we expect the number to keep growing. Protecting the safety and welfare of students in these schools is an agency priority.

Our goal is to ensure all driving school students receive high-quality classroom and behind-the-wheel instruction. To achieve this goal, DOL has:

- proposed legislation to increase our regulatory authority and set higher standards for driver training schools (see other side).
- made significant revisions to the Washington Administrative Code governing driver training schools (see other side).
- reorganized the program and added a full-time field auditor position to ensure driver training schools are inspected thoroughly and consistently.
- adopted a risk-based school audit program to identify schools most likely to have problems and focus our compliance resources where they will have the biggest impact.
- aggressively pursued disciplinary action against schools that are out of compliance with state law.



The Driver Instructors' Advisory Committee

The Driver Instructors' Advisory Committee consists of five members appointed by the director of DOL. This committee has played a vital part in developing the proposed administrative rules and statutory changes for this program.

The representatives are:

- One representative from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
- One representative from the Washington Traffic Safety Commission
- One driver training school owner
- One driver training school instructor representative
- The Driver Training School Program manager (committee chairperson).

Proposed driver training school legislation

The Department's current statutory authority limits our ability to be effective and take action against non-compliant schools and instructors. In order to effectively regulate and administer this program, the Department has asked the state Legislature to consider law changes that will strengthen our ability to protect the public, and ensure our students receive high quality traffic safety education. The proposed legislation would:

- expand the definition of fraudulent practices to include deceptive activities uncovered in recent audits.
- establish transparent procedures for transfer of ownership.
- increase the school's required insurance coverage from \$100,000 to \$1 million and include property damage and uninsured motorist coverage.
- transfer the setting of school and instructor license fees from statute to administrative rule to give the program the ability to set reasonable fees based on costs.
- expand the current requirement for criminal background checks of instructor applicants to include school owners, and add a requirement to include a local Washington State Patrol criminal background check with every license renewal.
- expand the requirements for an instructor's license to better ensure initial competency and continued eligibility following licensure.
- expand the instructor's license testing requirement to include the authority to determine the applicant's ability to impart knowledge.
- expand student curriculum requirements to include information on intermediate driver's license requirements and restrictions.
- bring the program under the provisions of the Uniform Regulation of Business and Professions Act (URBP) to provide for uniform disciplinary action and standardized procedures for business regulation. The URBP assures the public of adequate business competence and conduct and promotes public safety.

Recent administrative rule changes

The existing statutory authority granted to the Department of Licensing is limited and does not meet program needs. While waiting for the adoption of the legislation aimed at fixing these problems, the Department drafted new administrative rules to better define its authority to regulate the program. These recent changes:

- clarified requirements for instructor's licenses, including the timing of criminal background checks and better defining disqualifying offenses.
- set standards for instructing the instructors in the training of drivers.
- clarified requirements for classroom space.
- specified requirements for traffic safety education vehicles.
- established school administration requirements.
- established recordkeeping and reporting requirements.
- revised curriculum requirements and set standards to ensure student accomplishment.
- established standards for disciplinary actions for errant schools and instructors.